

15. He became flesh to dwell among us

Christ became man, came into the world, to permit man to become related to God. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).

John seems to take up again the testimony of Stephen, who sees the glory of Christ in his being at the right hand of the Father. But to permit us to contemplate his glory, the Word became flesh and came to dwell among us. He became man, and a man who lives with us, who puts himself in a position of familiarity with us.

In his first encounter with Jesus, John seems at that moment to want to illustrate this announcement from the Prologue of his Gospel, since he describes how, to Jesus’s question, “What are you looking for?” he and Andrew respond, “Master, where are you staying?” (cf. Jn 1:38). Did they perceive that He was the Word of God come to dwell in our midst? Did they intuit that He was present precisely for this reason, that man might go to see where he was staying and be with Him the whole day?

At any rate it was that day that the first disciples discovered the fascination of the possibility of closeness with God in Christ, which they would later deepen ever more, for their whole life, recognizing there the fullness of their life and the fullness of all, something to announce and transmit to all, as St. John puts it explicitly and definitively at the beginning of his first letter:

“We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:1-4).

We should meditate on the whole Gospel and get help from the Church essentially to live this out, this closeness with the mystery of Christ, as St. John lived it out and bore witness to it, in the name of all the apostles. Because only this fills us with joy, with a joy that is “ours,” a joy that can be experienced in communion with those who live in communion with the Father and the Son in virtue of the encounter with Jesus, of the encounter that began a closeness with Him and with the Father that was absolutely daily, even physical (“what we have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life”), and yet also extraordinary, because it is closeness with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

St. Paul calls the Ephesians back to the same awareness of the extraordinary mystery that has become familiar: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph 2:19-22).

The expression “members of the household of God – *oikeioi tou Theou*” gives the idea in Greek of sharing a house, of being those who live in the same house with God, who are “of the household” in God’s house. It is therefore more intimate than being “fellow citizens with the saints,” where the term (*sym-polites*) means sharing a city, the *polis*, and thus a relationship much less intimate than being “family.” But what is interesting in this passage of St. Paul is that we are ourselves the house in which we are familiar with God. God builds us up to be a dwelling in which He can be close to us. He builds us up by building up the Christian community, “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,” and “with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.” And each one of us is built up along with the others “to become a dwelling place for God through the Spirit.” All this can be summarized in the awareness that each one of us is called to closeness with God, but this personal familiarity cannot mature except in the familiarity of the Church. We personally become a dwelling place of God, a temple of God, in the measure in which we participate in the up-building of the Church, letting ourselves be built up in it. But one thing is certain: the whole “building site,” personal and communal, has one goal, one common goal: to live out this closeness with God, this communion with God, to be His friends.

The same St. Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, takes this topic back up but in regard to our resurrection after death. He writes: “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling (...). He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor 5:1–2, 5).

God created us precisely in order to be clothed in our “heavenly dwelling,” that is, to be ourselves the dwelling place of God as we now begin to be it in the measure in which the Spirit dwells in us. The resurrection after death, even the resurrection of our bodies, means ultimately that closeness with God will totally define us, that our whole being will be communion with God. Paul feels urgency to live this out: “We do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8).

Basically, when we meet in Heaven, we will recognize each other not so much by the face, or by name, or by what we are now, but we will recognize each other as close relatives of God, as him or her who dwells with God and in whom and with whom God dwells. This will not cancel out our identity, but rather will make it even more particular, unique, unrepeatable. And this will make us live out the deepest communion, without distances and unfamiliarity, because it is the one God in three Persons who will be close to each and every one. God will be “all in all” and therefore we shall be totally united in Him, precisely because he will dwell entirely in all (cf. Col. 3:11; Eph 4:6).